SOCIO-ECOMOMIC DIAGNOSIS OF SMALLHOLDERS IN RO04 MACROREGION - I. SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

DIAGNOZA SOCIO-ECONOMICĂ A FERMELOR DE SUBSISTENŢĂ DIN MACROREGIUNEA RO4 – I. PERCEPŢII SOCIALE

I. HUŢU[1], LAURA COSTOIU[1], IRINA PATRAŞ[1], ELENA PEŢ[1]

[1]Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Timisoara, Romania; i.hutu@unitate-extensie.org.ro.

Abstract: *The aim of paper is to reveal the preliminary results of socio-economic diagnosis carried out on smallholders in RO04 Region of Romania from 9 counties in the West and South West part of Romania. The multi-layered, random sample volume, representative for the macro-region (maximum permitted error of ±1.6%) consisted of 4.100 persons aged 18 and over. The interviews were conducted using CATI method. Fieldwork was conducted between 5 to 19th September, 2010. For the studied sample, the respondents with numerous LUs are: more satisfied, optimists concerning actual and future living standards, less confident in media, detached from a possible involvement of government ($p<0.01$) and president ($p<0.001$) on farm's welfare, cautious, circumspect and unpleased with the mayor's activity and involvement ($p<0.05$) in attracting European funds, they dissociate religious and economical aspects of life ($p<0.01$), being more lean toward "learning by nearness" from friends and neighbors ($p<0.01$). The respondents with fewer animals are more confidence in the media ($p<0.001$) and more satisfied with the mayor's activity ($p<0.001$). The issues presented can support the assumption that farm or household size, in terms of livestock, influences the position in society and some perceptions upon social life.*

Key words: *socioeconomic diagnosis, rural area, RO04, smallholders, Livestock Unit (LU)*

INTRODUCTION

Through *RO4 RuralBIZ* project – *Initiatives for a sustainable rural development* it was initiated and carried a study, a macro-regional diagnosis of the rural environment. The objectives of the diagnosis were: i)

identification of key issues and population's needs from the rural area of West and South-West and ii) consultancy and financing demands identification of rural residents of the macro-region RO04.

The aim of this paper is to present partial results of the *Socio-economical diagnosis or rural area in the macro-region RO04 (West and South-West Regions)*, performed only on the sub-sample of smallholders.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

To identify the consultancy needs it was used the focus-group method with farmers and the half – structured in depth interview method with experts or employers came from the branches of consultancy, training, qualifications and opportunities in developing business.

From 5th to 19th September 2011 there were organized 18 focus-groups with farmers and 40 interviews with experts or employers, in each of the 9 counties of the macro-region RO04. The survey took part in the *RO4RURALBIZ– Initiatives for a sustainable rural development*[2] project.

Projected number of participants for each focus group was 6 to 8, the composition variables of the groups being: recipients/non-beneficiaries of the advice, the type of firm (individual, family and association), level of education (average, higher education). From the initial data base (4.100 respondents), only breeders were extracted, who had in their household activities of raising animals (3.592 respondents); the activity was quantified using as indicator the Livestock Units.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Romanian farmer regrets the period before 1989, his choice is being justified through the advantages represented by the security of having a job, income sufficiency, receiving a free house and prices stability *(Păun 2001, Vedinaş 2000)*.

At the level of macro-region RO04 the control variable (LU) has an average value equal to 3.01±0.24 UVM[3], minimum of 0.01 UVM and maximum of 479.09 UVM. Averages of the two regions are significantly different, those being 3.75±0.55 UVM for Western Region and 2.63±0.22 UVM for South –West Region (F=4.99 at p=0.05) but comparable with

[2] Contract nr. POS DRU/83/5.2/S/47717
[3] Mean and standard error of mean

South Serbian Banat area *(Subici & Huţu, 2009).*

General aspects

Almost 90% (88% in West Region, 89 in South-West Region) of respondents believe that things are going in a wrong direction, while only 8% think that things are going in a right direction. If we question the answers after LU, those who say that the direction is good are those who have more LU.

Regarding the living standards, there were no major differences recorded data gathered through questioning people in the two areas: in the Western Region only 1% of respondents are very satisfied with the way they live, 18% are fairly satisfied, while 81% are dissatisfied or not satisfied. Similarly, in the South-West Region, 2% of respondents are very satisfied, 13% fairly satisfied, while 84% are dissatisfied or not satisfied. In terms of farm size, those who are very satisfied with their living standards are the ones who have an average 5.38 LU.

Even in the perception of how will they live in a year from now, there is noted an increased pessimism: in both areas, over 60% of respondents consider that they will live worse, around 20% believe they will live in the same way, while 10% of them think they will have a better life. Here too there is a trend: optimists hold 4.08±1.02 LU and pessimists only 2.77±0.23 LU.

General perceptions

In the two areas of development, there are similar views on the agreement with the following statements: "government is concerned about the fate of Romanian farmers – 29%; however, the farmers with more LUs (6.31±1.94) did not responded, those with more LUs disagree (2.58±0.27 UVM) from those who agree with the statement (3.54±0.42 UVM); the differences are statistically significant (F=5.80 at p<0.01) and indicate caution for those with more animals with the government's concern.

The agreement is maintained when it is claimed that "European funds are not distributed fairly – 59%", "Government should pay higher subsidies for agriculture" – 94%; "Mayor is not interested in the lives of citizens" – 38%. Differences arise in relation to other statements proposed to respondents; largely, residents from the West consider that the village priest is an honest man: 86% vs. 82%; in this case also, farmers with more LUs did not responded (6.36±3.95 LU) or disagree the statement (3.34±0.60

LU). Differences are statistically significant (F=5.80 at p<0.01) and suggest dissociation of religious aspect from the economical one.

The hypothesis does not necessarily sustain Weberian conception, regarding the relationship between Protestant ethic and the capitalist one, does not advocate that religious forms (Ortodoxy, Catholicism, Neoprotestantism etc.) determine specifics in profane sphere of life: economic, politics, social, cultural, and only confirms the observations that a higher standard of living is able to remove the closeness of faithful from the representative of church *(Gheorghe, 2009).*

As well, by comparison with the South, the West are consider that justice in Romania is corrupt to a greater extent – 79% vs. 74%, are more skeptical concerning correctness of doctors – 52% vs. 56% and the fact that EU integration would be a better thing – 76% vs. 84%.

Otherwise, again, opinions are equable on the macroregion level: majority (89%) believe that bureaucracy is too high in Romania, 90% consider appropriate for their children higher education, 88% agree that costs agricultural costs are higher than earnings, 84% see Romania as a corrupt country and 22% believe that the association of agricultural producers is a bad solution.

From the respondents sampled, 60% would be willing to learn a new job; availability for retraining is more pronounced in those who have fewer LUs (2.80±0.24 LU) than those who have more (3.37±0.47 LU).

Confidence in institutions

About trusting in European Union it can be said that people in South-West Region show a slightly higher confidence: 30% of them have much or very much trust, while in the West Region only 24% give the same answers.

Confidence in the Romanian Government is very low among the populations studied: 6% of respondents in the Western area and 5% of the South West region said they had much or very much trust in this institution. Confidence in Parliament is even lover: only 4% of rural residents of macro-region RO04 have much or very much trust in it. Trust in Justice is also relatively low: 14% and 13% of respondents declare they have much or very much confidence, while 82% in both regions have little or very little trust.

Confidence in the Romanian Presidency at the level of Macro-region RO04 is 13% [much (3.81±0.83 LU) + very much (4.02±1.28 LU)], while 8 6% of respondents have little (1.99±0.23 LU) or very little confidence

(3.07±0.33 LU) in it. Differences between averages LU are statistically significant (F=5.56 at p<0.001); practically, richer people are more detached from the president position and his role in the welfare of the farm.

Respondents with more LUs have a low confidence level in media (4.56±1.02 LU), with small differences between the two regions; 6% of them have very much trust (2.42±0.27 LU) and 35% have much confidence (2.79±0.49 LU) in the media. Differences recorded in terms of averages LU are statistically significant (F=5.59 at p<0.001); practically, richer people care less the media.

In terms of confidence in Mayor there are no appreciable differences between the two regions; at the level of macroregion, 53% of interviewers trust much or very much trust in their mayor. The same thing happens when it comes to confidence in City Council: at the macro region level, 40% of respondents trust in this institution.

Respondent in the West shows a level of trust in the village priest slightly higher than those in the South-West: 71% vs. 67% (very much +much trust). Thus, it can be said that there is an increase level of confidence in the priest, at the macro region level. Head of post benefits much or very much trust from 50% of respondents. At the same time, only 24% of them trust in agricultural associations. A significant difference between the two areas appears when it comes to trust in neighbors: 71% in West vs. 61% in South-West. The highest level of confidence is noticed, as expected, inside family: over 95%.

Central authorities are perceived as being uninterested on Romanian farmer's fate and politicians are frequently accused of mimicking the rural interests in elections only, but during their mandates do nothing for citizens.

Perception on authorities' activities

Most rural residents from macro region RO04 are unpleased with agricultural policy: 84% in West and 88% in South West. They would give to current government an average, score 4 of 10 for their activity in agriculture from the last recent years.

Institutions which are perceived by individuals as having a great influence on their lives are, first church (28 % in West, 23% in South West), government (11% in West, 9% in South West), presidency (9% in West, 11% in South West), City Hall (10% in West, 11% in South West) and media (10% vs. 11%). At the same time, around one fifth of those surveyed

consider that no institution can significantly affect their lives.

Perceptions on mayor's activities

On macro region level, 54% of respondents are satisfied (2.61±0.43 LSU) or very satisfied (2.66±0.43 LSU) with village mayor's activity concerning attracting European funds, with no significant differences between regions. Among 54% of the satisfied respondents, few posses large herds of animals; smallholders are either unsatisfied (3.30±0.65 LSU) or very unsatisfied (3.18±0.56 LU). Or they refuse to answer to the question (26.01±9.23 LU). Differences between averages LU are statistically significant (F=14.50 at p<0.001) and shows precaution and dissatisfaction of those with large herds for the mayor's involvement to raise funds which would be potential involved in farm's welfare.

Similarly, regarding roads constructions at the macro region level, 51% of those surveyed declare themselves satisfied. However, Western area residents are more satisfied by utilities introduction more that those from South West: 58% vs. 50%. The level of satisfaction is similar, also when it comes to informing and consulting the people: 52% in the macro-region. Again, satisfactions is not given by the smallholders, which are either unsatisfied (3.38±0.41 LU), or very unsatisfied (4.40±1.24 LU), or they are not familiar with this activity (5.61±2.20 LU). Differences between averages LU are statistically significant (F=2.43 at p<0.05) and shows wariness and frustration of many small holders over mayor's activity.

Differences appear again on approaching the creation of jobs; people are rather dissatisfied, especially those from South West: only 19% are satisfied in West and 15% in South West. People in the two areas are equally satisfied in terms of mayor's interest regarding their problems: 44% at RO04.

There is a very high level of satisfaction when it comes to how the Mayor managed renovation of schools: 76% of respondents are satisfied or very pleased with in the whole macroregion. Not in terms of satisfaction on social aid does not appear differences between the two regions, overall satisfaction level was 42%.

Knowledge of funding opportunities

Knowledge across governmental and European funds regarding the rural areas, as it is self-assessed by the respondents do not differ in the two regions. Therefore, in the macroregion, the results were as follows: most respondents consider themselves as uninformed – 82%, appreciating as

being slightly informed or not informed at all, while only 15% think they are pretty informed are very informed.

Sources of information about this topic are used similarly in the two areas. Thus, the most used way is by television, for 46% surveyed. A greater relevance for those holding herd is having the radio.

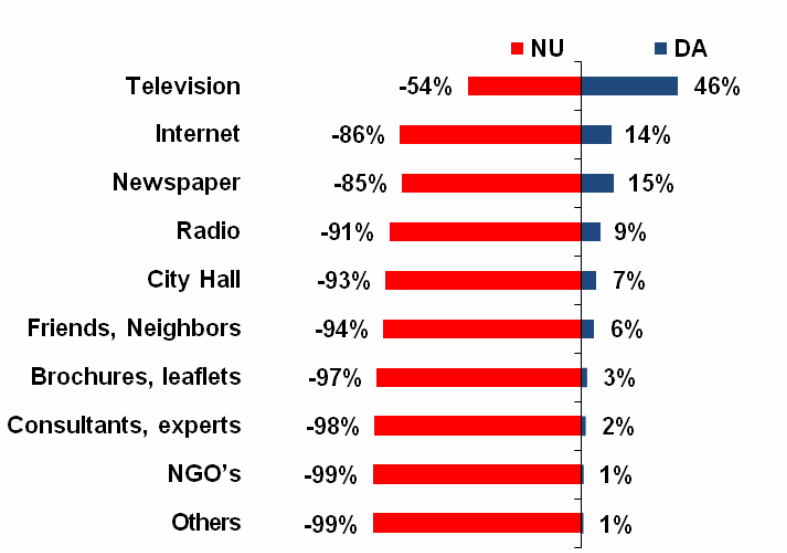


Figure no 1. Sources of information concerning governmental and European funds for rural areas

The study supports the hypothesis of "learning by nearness"; the biggest impact having the friends and neighbors – averages LUs in households respondents who have more animals (6.22±1.46 LU) than those with smaller herds (2.67±0.26 LU) are significantly different (t=11.18 la p<0.01).

Likewise, it can be sustained the hypothesis that NGOs have a good impact on information. Respondents who said "yes" have more animals (8.14±3.87 LU) compared with those who say "no" (2.96±0.23 LU) to significant t=4.71 and p<0.05.

The internet and printed media are the next used sources (14% and 15% respectively), the rest being used to a lesser extent.

The issues presented can support the assumption that farm or household size, in terms of livestock, influences the position in society and some perceptions upon social life.

CONCLUSIONS

For the representative sample in the RO04 macroregion, the **respondents with a larger number of animals**, considered in LUs are:

- more satisfied, optimists concerning actual and future living standards, less confident in media, detached from a possible involvement of government and president on farm's welfare,
- circumspect within the government preoccupation on farmers' faith
- cautious, circumspect and unpleased with the mayor's activity and involvement in attracting infrastructural European funds
- they dissociate secular, religious from the laic, economical one
- more lean toward "learning by nearness" from friends and neighbors
- catalyzed stronger on funding programs

Treated from the amount of LUs, **respondents with fewer animals** are:

- more confidence in the media
- more satisfied with the mayor's activity

REFERENCES

1. **** Diagnoza socio-economică a mediului rural la nivelul acroregional RO4 (Regiunea Vest şi Regiunea Sud-Vest)* – Studiu al USAMVB efectuat de către S.C. Internaţional Brand Consultants SRL. Timişoara 2011.
2. **MANUELA GHEORGHE** - Comportamentul economic al credincioşilor în mediul rural românesc *„Revista Română de Sociologie",* serie nouă, anul XX, nr. 3–4, p. 351–359, Bucureşti, 2009
3. **PĂUN, I.O.**, *Restructurarea agriculturii şi dezvoltarea rurală în România în vederea aderării la UE*, Editura Agroprint, Timişoara, 2000.
4. **SUBIC J., HUTU I,** *Particularităţile agriculturii Serbiei in Banatul de Sud,* Editurile Institutul Economic Agrară Belgrad şi Mirton - Timişoara, 2009.
5. **VEDINAŞ TRAIAN** – *Introducere în sociologia rurala*, Polirom 2001.